VICTORIANS AND THE UNDERGROUND

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Victorians and the Underground

by

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Victorians and the Underground

The Victorian Age created a revolution in technology that defined the age and has fostered its social ideologies. In every civilization, the technologies of the time reflect the social issues of the culture. For instance, the development of the printing press in the fifteenth-century revealed desires for higher literacy rates; the invention of the cotton gin incited the social injustices of American slavery; the progress of the Internet embodies this century's attachment to fast-food, fast-money, and fast-information. Likewise, in the Victorian Age, the invention of underground tunnels exposed some important social issues which developed in the period. Just as the physical image of a tunnel promotes a sense of enclosure and confinement, the tunnel symbol seems subconsciously to pervade Victorian literature and art as it reflects the treatment of women in the eyes of the male artist. Specifically, the way in which women are portrayed, both poetically and socially, reflects the desire by men to imprison or enclose the sexual power of women. For the Victorians, tunnels represent not only the thriving age of industrialization, but they also symbolically suggest the social confinement of nineteenth-century women.

For the Victorians, change was occurring everywhere. From Darwinian evolution to the rise of Capitalism to the Industrial Revolution, this age seemed to reflect the growing demands of mass production and the belief in urbanization. With the invention of railways and the subway, the world would soon realize the growing power of Britain and her people. For the first time, Englishmen abandoned the simple transportation systems of carriages and horses and started to depend on mechanical vehicles—vehicles which were built underground, operated underground, and moved people underground. In effect, these long-stretching tunnels became a Victorian symbol of technological advancement.

The Great Exhibition and Underground Tunnels

Perhaps nothing expresses better the English excitement for expansion and progress through technology than the Great Exhibition of 1851. Promoted by Prince Albert, the Great Exhibition became the first world's fair, featuring thirteen thousand exhibits represented by cultures around the globe. England had "all the world going to see the Great Exhibition of 1851" (Wilson 145), an exhibition located in the "Crystal Palace" which was made out of glass and steel. The 902 panes of glass it took to build this "Palace of Glass" reflected the urbanization and mass production of the era. Even the infrastructure of this monumental symbol of British industrialization curiously resembles a tunnel. With its long, horizontal design, the exhibition floor stretched for yards from one end of the building to the other. In fact, a visitor could stand at one end of the Crystal Palace and look down to the other, as if it were a straight pathway underneath these reflective panes of glass. The enclosure of the glass ceiling symbolically reflects the way visitors could look out of this tunnel-like infrastructure but at the same time be closed in physically. The similarity between the structural design of the Crystal Palace and the architecture of one of London's underground tunnels is best described by Robert Thorne:

> At Paddington Station (1851-4) the design team (including, once again, Fox Henderson) sought to perpetuate the lessons of the Crystal Palace in more permanent form while memories of the original were still fresh. The bays at Paddington are on a 30-foot module, rather than the 24 feet at Crystal Palace, and the roofs are elliptical arches, but the similarities between the two projects are obvious. No other major railway station followed the language of the Great Exhibition quite so closely. (181)

Delamotte, Philip Henry. "The Nave Looking North." 1855. The Photographic Institution; London, England. "Construction work in progress on the nave of the reconstructed Crystal Palace exhibition hall at Sydenham Hill" (<http://www.collectbritain.co.uk/personalisation/object.cfm>

Constructing Paddington (Praed Street) Station, London, 1866-8. Picture Reference: 10325362

As exemplified by the Crystal Palace, the image of the tunnel, whether consciously or not, mirrors real Victorian concerns about the social confinement of the period.

Just as the tunnel becomes a symbol for Victorian expansion and progress, the enclosed and confined underground tunnel also symbolizes the psychological entrapment of women. It is often said that the Victorian Age was an age of contradictions. Women were supposed to take care of the home and hearth—to stay in their domestic sphere and uphold the virtues of the family. Numerous conduct books for women became widespread during the century, including Sarah Stickney Ellis' *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* and Isabella Beeton's *The Book of Household Management*. These publications praised the role of the wife and mother, and they supported the domestic duties of all women. The entire society revered this "woman of domesticity" who helped shape the ideal family home. Contrarily, the period also birthed a generation of advocates against the established traditions of women's roles. Women like Florence Nightingale and Frances Powers Cobbe sought social reform for the rights of women. Rights for equal opportunities for education seemed to be at the forefront of these concerns and John Stuart Mill became a campaigner for gender equality. Although the treatment of women remained a constant issue among Victorians, the way in which men portrayed their female subjects through their art remained fixed. In art and poetry, the voices of women are forever buried and closed off; Victorian women are suffocated and motionless in the canvas or on the page. Like the underground, they are entrapped by their male makers and are exorcised from society.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic,* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar expound on this idea of the confined woman in their chapter titled "The Parables of the Cave." In this chapter, they take Plato's Allegory of the Cave and relate it to the story of women in the patriarchal Victorian

society. Like the men in Plato's passage who are imprisoned in the underground cavern because of their delusions, so too, are Victorian women "imprisoned in, not empowered by, such caves" (*Madwoman* 93). Gilbert and Gubar remind us that "a cave is—as Freud pointed out—a female place, a womb-shaped enclosure, a house of earth, secret and often sacred" (93). While a cave is supposed to be a positive feminine space for "the woman whose cave-shaped anatomy is her destiny" (94), a place which is secret and sacred, it instead becomes a restrictive holding place for women. For Plato and his culture, the place to hold these prisoners is in an underground cave; for the Victorians with their technology, the place to hold their prisoners is in the nineteenth-century subways and underground transportation systems. Just as Plato's male cave-dwellers are deluded about reality, the wives, mothers, and daughters of the Victorians were deluded to think about their social position as one of inferiority and second-best to man. "The Parables of the Cave" bears great insight into the claustrophobia of women: "the women of this underground harem are obviously buried in (and by) patriarchal definitions of their sexuality [...] enclosure without any possibility of escape" (*Madwoman* 94). Writers such as Tennyson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Robert Browning create in their poetry women characters who are very much trapped inside enclosed structures and are, like the Plato's cave-dwellers, instilled with the idea that *shadows* of reality represent the real world, rather than the true essence of reality.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

In many of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's early poems such as "Mariana" and "The Lady of Shalott," one can see how the female figures have been portrayed as isolated and alienated. These women are entrapped by both their physical environment and by the poet himself and are mutes who are confined to the imagination of their creator. They are portrayed through a man's

perspective and are thus unable to have their own voices heard. Critics Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar put it perfectly when they write:

> For if the author/father is owner of his text and of his reader's attention, he is also, of course, owner/possessor of the subjects of his text, that is to say of those figures, scenes, and events—those brain children—he has both incarnated in black and white and 'bound' in cloth or leather. (*Madwoman* 7)

Male poets and artists have the tendency to choke out the voices of their subjects in their portrayal. In "Mariana," the leading lady is isolated from her society. She remains "upon the lonely moated grange" (l. 8) and looks out into the night crying for her dear Angelo to come to her side. She closes herself in as "she [draws] her casement-curtain by" (l. 9) and endlessly resounds those dreadful words, "'I am aweary, aweary, / Oh God, that I were dead'" (l. 83-4). She represents the abandoned woman. Mariana pines away for her lover day after day, for she is dependent on the presence of a male. The only voice that she has is the suppressed one that her male creator has fancied. Both Mariana's fictional lover Angelo and her poet-creator have closed all doors for her and have left her sleepless and forever mourning in her decaying halls. She is utterly defenseless against both of these male forces. As Thais E. Morgan states, "The fact that Mariana wishes to die suggests that the male poet's appropriation of the feminine preserves rather than changes the dominant ideologies of separate spheres" (205). Tennyson himself seems to endorse the prevailing attitude about a woman's reliance on a man, and he supports Mariana's enclosure as he creates the ending to her story. In his poem, Mariana remains forever closed off from Angelo and from her society, whereas in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Mariana eventually is granted a marriage with her defiant fiancé. Tennyson's deliberate reversal of Shakespeare's original Mariana confirms what Victorians assumed about

women—that they are helpless and silent without their male "rescuers." It is unclear whether Tennyson as a male poet supports this view of women which he portrays. What is clear, however, is that Tennyson is very much a man of his time. He creates medieval female characters whose fates reflect the fates of Victorian women. His characters are imitations of Victorian women who have no social freedoms.

In a social context, Mariana very much represents the Victorian woman who strongly yearns for gender equality and educational opportunities, but is confined to her homely responsibilities. Society has imposed certain domestic duties on her and she cannot leave her place. Women like Mariana can only look outside their windows and dream dreams: "All their place and visions seem vanished, and they know not where; gone, and they cannot recall them. They do not even remember them. And they are left without the food either of reality or of hope" (Nightingale 1511). Just as Mariana lives in a world in which she must be passive and wait for her beloved Angelo, women in the male-dominant Victorian age are confined to passively wait for their social equality. In Carol Dyhouse's essay, "Role of Women: From Self-Sacrifice to Self-Awareness," she confirms the nineteenth-century notion that women are to be submissive, passive, and self-sacrificing for their family and their society. Women are to strive towards the Ideal Woman, perfect in appearance and behavior; and to do this, the Victorian woman must silently resign her own desires for those of her family (174). Also, Dyhouse quotes in her essay a letter from a father to his daughter. In *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, written in 1774, Dr. Gregory says, "'Your whole life is often a life of suffering [...] You must bear your sorrows in silence, unknown and unpitied'" (175). This reinforces the idea that women's voices are to be buried and closed off. Tennyson has created in Mariana this Victorian

concept of the Silenced Woman—a powerless figure who suffers privately within her isolated, confined space.

"The Lady of Shalott" depicts yet another female subject who has been closed off by society and whose voice has been buried. First of all, she is physically closed off by four castle walls:

> Four gray wall, and four gray towers,
>
> Overlook a space of flowers,
>
> And the silent isle imbowers
>
> The Lady of Shalott. (ll. 15-19)

She is in touch with the outside world only through her mirror, and even then she sees only where "shadows of the world appear" (l. 48). She lives life from the inside and desires to get out, for she is "half sick of shadows" (l. 71). When the Lady of Shalott sees the reflection of the "red-cross knight" Lancelot, she throws down her mirror and goes down to Camelot to find her knight; but by making her bold step outside of her enclosed tower, she initiates the curse upon her and sings her last song. As she floats into Camelot, she becomes deathly silent. Her last song is heard faintly by the villagers, but no one heeds her coming: the "knight and burgher, lord and dame" (l. 160) wait for her noiseless arrival. She has been so long enclosed inside that tower that even when she escapes, she is still unable to be heard. The Lady of Shalott, like Mariana, is fixed in a patriarchal society where she must endure a solitary life while waiting for happiness that only a man can give her; but contrary to Mariana, she reacts against social and physical confinement. She ventures out, and what is her fate? A silent, unheard death. The Lady of Shalott is destroyed because of her self-assertion and forward actions toward liberality—a woman's liberality that Victorians themselves would have disapproved of.

The implication in both of these early poems by Tennyson is that if a woman continues to live within her closed, claustrophobic environment she cannot survive. Likewise, if she rejects social tradition and steps out into that male-dominant world, she will be forcibly silenced and her voice will be choked off. For both women, their fates are sealed with destruction. Being a man of his time, Tennyson knows that these women cannot be expected to survive their enclosure. As feminist critics Gilbert and Gubar assert, "A life of feminine submission, of 'contemplative purity,' is a life of silence, a life that has no pen and no story, while a life of female rebellion, of 'significant action,' is a life that must be silenced, a life whose monstrous pen tells a terrible story" (*Madwoman* 36). For the Victorian woman, both choices bring about a cursed life. In his book *Rossetti and the Fair Lady,* scholar David Sonstroem describes the "sexually innocent ladies whose lovers victimize them nevertheless by deserting or tormenting them" (104). Although Sonstroem's comment is specifically regarding some of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's feminine subjects, a like parallel can be made between Rossetti and Tennyson's portrayal of the female subject. The Lady of Shalott and Marianna are innocent ladies who are abandoned and destroyed by their male lovers.

The fact that Tennyson chooses to portray Mariana and the Lady of Shalott in such trapped situations is telling of man's outlook on the established role of women. Not only are the women themselves victims of Angelo's betrayal and Lancelot's ambivalence, but they are also the victims of their poet-creator. Tennyson gives them no choice to change their fate: if Mariana does not leave her grange, she dies; if the Lady of Shalott leaves her tower, she dies. Both women are incapable of changing the fate that Tennyson has created for them, just as nineteenth-century British women are confined within their domestic spheres with buried voices. The woman is portrayed just as the male creator-poet chooses to reveal her:

> As a creation 'penned' by man, moreover, woman has been 'penned up' or 'penned in.' As a sort of 'sentence' man has spoken, she has herself been 'sentenced': fated, jailed, for he has both 'indited' her and 'indicted' her. As a thought he has 'framed,' she has been both 'framed' (enclosed) in his texts, glyphs, graphics, and 'framed up' (found guilty, found wanting) in his cosmologies." (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 13)

With Mariana and the Lady of Shalott, both of their confined environments and social entrapments symbolize the way in which many men in the nineteenth-century objectified women, including the way in which poets and artists portrayed their female subjects.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Perhaps no other artist and poet during the Victorian Age adored women as much as Dante Gabriel Rossetti did. From describing them as angels and fallen women in his poems to painting them as damozels and temptresses on his canvases, his fascination with the beauty of a woman pervades his entire artistic consciousness. Stanley T. Williams concludes that with a study of Rossetti's poems "The Blessed Damozel" and "Jenny," one can see "both in the joy and in the sorrow the central feeling is that of his ideal: beauty in woman as a symbol of the artist's ideal beauty" (198). Although Rossetti's notion of the Ideal Beauty allows him to appreciate and admire women, this is the very thing that drives him to victimize his female subjects, both artistically and personally. He idolizes his female subjects to the point that he becomes disillusioned with what beauty really is; for in these poems one can see the change from "idealizing illusion to bitter disillusion" (Johnson 119). Even his beloved Elizabeth Siddal, with her imperfect health and facial freckles, cannot live up to the perfect standards of womanhood

that his paintings try to present. By insisting on perfect women for his perfect art, Dante Gabriel Rossetti creates female subjects that try to live up to his impossible standards, but are closed off and barred from society, just as the underground Victorian tunnel is buried from the observable landscape.

In Dante Gabriel Rossetti's early poem "The Blessed Damozel," he creates a heavenly woman who is dissatisfied with her sanctified place in Heaven and yearns to be with her earthly lover. Although she is in that perfect place of blessed safety, she is closed off from her true desires. As she "cast[s] her arms along / golden barriers" (l. 141-42) of heaven, the Blessed Damozel yearns "to live as once on earth / With love" (l. 129-30). She is trapped by the bar that separates Heaven and Earth and is disenchanted by Heaven's perfect atmosphere. Like Tennyson, Rossetti has created a powerless woman who must wait for a male figure in order to attain what she believes to be true happiness and to be integrated into society. Perhaps Paul Turner summarizes this poem best when he says, "'The Blessed Damozel' was a carefully composed portrait of a dead girl, waiting Mariana-like for the arrival of her earthly lover [...]" (117). Even in the end of the poem, the woman's desires are heard but not listened to: her tears are shed, but not consoled. The other angels leave her upon heaven's bar to weep alone as she mourns her unloved state. Her claustrophobia and entrapment in Heaven (which is supposed to be the "place of comfort") parallels the nature of the buried tunnel in Victorian life. The Blessed Damozel has ultimately become both the victim of sorrow and despair, and she represents the suffocating woman—a woman who is suffocated by the torment of living without her lover, and who is also closed off from any true attachment to heaven and earth.

In Rossetti's famous poem "Jenny," the speaker in the poem has hired a woman of service for the evening, but she has "fallen" asleep on his lap. He therefore has time for reflection,

although he reflects not on his decision to hire this woman, but he wonders what she thinks of, how her life has been spent. He views this "lazy languid Jenny" not as an active, living, breathing woman, but as an object. At first read, this poem might seem like a man's epiphany of the injustices of prostitution and the "dark path [he] can strive to clear" (l. 390). But upon a closer examination, this is a poem about power; specifically, it is a story of a man's self-projected superiority over Jenny. Throughout the speaker's monologue, he implies that Jenny is inferior to him socially and intellectually. However, the main reason the male speaker thinks Jenny is beneath him in every way is that she is a prostitute. Because of her profession, Jenny is belittled and degraded by her buyer. As defined by her male counterpart, woman is "in the dark tunnel" both socially and intellectually. Her voice is buried just as the Victorian tunnels led people underground and closed them off from social interaction.

From the first line in the poem, readers are thrown full force into the male speaker's world—a world encompassing harsh and critical attitudes toward Jenny, his prize. Throughout the course of the poem, he insensitively calls Jenny many things: "Lazy laughing languid Jenny" (l. 1), a "thoughtless queen of kisses" (l. 7-8), "poor little Jenny" (l. 299), and others. Again and again, she is called "poor," "shameful," "*my* Jenny" (my italics), implying that she is lesser than him and she is his property. The male speaker never forgets that Jenny is a prostitute, and he uses her profession as a way of degrading her. He reminds himself that she is a "fallen" woman, with her "silk ungirdled and unlac'd" (l. 48). He prides himself on the fact that he is kind enough to dine her and give her rest, unlike her other customers. Perhaps he even thinks of himself as a Christ figure, echoing the promise Jesus made when he said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (*New King James Bible,* Mt. 11:28). Pompously, he says to her while she is asleep, "perhaps you're merely glad / That I'm not drunk or ruffianly /

And let you rest upon my knee" (l. 64-66). Obviously, she is *so* lucky to have a thoughtful, kind man like him, a man who believes himself doing her a great service by charitably giving her some food and a place to rest. While these things he does for her would be genuine in and of themselves, they are not because of his reproachful attitude toward her. He does them so that he looks like the knight in shining armor, the noble savior who can lift up the fallen and rescue one from the enclosed underground tunnel.

Further in the poem, the male speaker reminds himself (and Jenny while she sleeps) that she is a prostitute as he imagines how others view Jenny. He tells her that other people "[point] you out, what thing you are:— / Yes, from the daily jeer and jar, / From shame and shame's outbraving too" (ll. 79-81). He acknowledges that she is made fun of by others because of the "thing" she is, and that her profession exudes shame. Even all the "learned London children know, / Poor Jenny, all [her] pride and woe" (ll. 143-144). It is curious, though, that never once does he ask her how she sees herself, but he assumes that she must be shamed because that is what he and others believe. In fact, he is afraid that she is so defiled that she might contaminate him, for he says, "I've filled our glasses, let us sup, / And do not let me think of you, / Lest shame of yours suffice for two" (l. 90-92). In his attempt to remain holier than her and superior to Jenny, he hopes that her shame will not overtake him too. It is okay for her to be shamed, besides, she is a prostitute after all, but for a learned man to be shamed is outrageous. His superiority is assumed merely because of her profession, and he continuously degrades her person because of it. The ironic thing is that *he* is the one who buys her services. So, he is just as guilty of the immoral activities which he accuses her of; however, as A. N. Wilson reminds us, the woman will always be the guilty and blamed because Victorians believed "[her] sin was much greater than the man's" (308).

As the male speaker continues to mention Jenny's poor fallen state, he also sets her up beside other more virtuous women. He tries to emphasize the fact that she is inferior to him and others by comparing her to those whom he sees as socially superior. For instance, when he looks upon her sleeping state, he marvels that she actually looks like other women. He says, "Just as another woman sleeps!" (l. 177). He cannot believe that this lowly, shamed woman can share any characteristics with other women, especially women like his cousin Nell. The male speaker consciously makes mention of his cousin to set up a dichotomy between the virtuous Nell and the fallen Jenny. After making his comparisons, he says, "So pure,--so fall'n! How dare to think / Of the first common kindred link?" (ll. 207-208). He cannot even fathom his cousin sharing any traits with this woman whom he bought on the dance floor. His attitude here is entirely condescending as he believes Jenny to be utterly inferior to all of the women he knows. How dare she think that she shares something with the virtuous Nell? Certainly, the male speaker uses Jenny's profession as a motive for puffing himself up and for knocking her down. He has confined her to her profession and she cannot escape his harsh judgments or the disparaging glances of others.

Obviously, the male speaker in Rossetti's "Jenny" assumes his superiority over Jenny because of her profession as a prostitute. He denigrates her as he calls her insulting pet names and reminds himself what she must look like to others. In a thorough analysis of the poem, it is obvious that the man thinks of Jenny as being inferior to him in two ways: socially and intellectually. First of all, the male speaker asserts his social superiority over Jenny by controlling her movements and her actions. At the beginning of the poem, Jenny begins to fall asleep and he says,

Well, well then, keep

Your head there, so you do not sleep;

But that the weariness may pass

And leave you merry, take this glass. (ll. 93-96)

He does not want her to sleep; he wants her to stay awake and be merry for him. He did pay for her services, after all. He believes his desires to be more important than her physical need of sleep, so he feeds her and gives her drink to stay awake. When she begins to doze into a slumber, he succumbs and allows her to rest "[her] head upon [his] knee" (l. 19). According to E. Warwick Slim, Jenny's head on his knee is "the representative virtuality of female weakness ('as if' grown light) resting in a male heaven" (135). She lies down in the male space, just like many Victorian women must lie in a social male space as they are forced to live in a patriarchal society. The speaker asserts his power over Jenny by believing himself to be the creator of her life, just as "the potter's power over the clay" (l. 181). She becomes so drained of any rightful power that he cannot even recognize her as a woman; she is merely purchased merchandise. The longer he looks as her, "the woman almost fades from view" (l. 277), and only an object remains—an object that is "Poor little Jenny, good to kiss—" (l. 299). The way in which the male speaker objectifies Jenny and proclaims his social superiority over her is telling of attitudes pervading Rossetti's own society. The male buyers and familial breadwinners have the power, while the woman, either the prostitute or even the domesticated wife, must remain closed off and socially buried under his all-encompassing home rule.

Perhaps the clearest way the male speaker establishes his power over Jenny is by reaffirming his intellectual superiority. In the third stanza of the poem, readers are immediately introduced to two different lifestyles, that of a learned man and that of a dancing girl named Jenny. The male speaker's room is full of books, and he is sure to let Jenny know that his room

is more highly valuable than hers. He explicitly acknowledges his superior intellectual capacity when he says, "This room of yours, my Jenny, looks / A change from mine so full of books" (ll. 22-23). From the beginning, the male speaker makes us aware that he meets Jenny dancing idly at the party because he is tired of studying. He is drawn away from his intellectual activities to lower himself to her level on the dance floor. He even admits that when dancing, "it was a careless life [he] led" (l. 37). By saying that his life was insignificant when he is dancing, he is indirectly insulting Jenny's way of life. By degrading her enjoyment, he insults Jenny herself. Dancing is a thoughtless activity only fit for lazy, careless women, while the man's place is in the study and in the universities. The male speaker in Rossetti's "Jenny," therefore very much represents prevailing attitudes about women during the nineteenth century. Because women had such limited educational opportunities, many young girls and women were raised to become wives, mothers, and caretakers. Their vocation was in these roles and their workplace was in the home. Until the 1870s, women were not even allowed to study at universities and even then, they were not granted degrees until decades into the twentieth century. Therefore, men were thought to be intellectually, emotionally, and physically superior to women, and this explains the male speaker's attitude toward Jenny in Rossetti's poem. The speaker *knows* he is intellectually superior to Jenny, and he smugly reinforces this time and time again.

As the poem continues, the male speaker gets even more self-righteous about his intellectual superiority. He not only blatantly expresses that he is more learned and his space is full of books, but he also begins questioning her own mental capabilities and even goes so far as to think for her. He stares at her intently and realizes "what a book [she] seem[s], / Half-read by lightning in a dream! / How should you know, my Jenny?" (ll. 51-53). This small passage is full of meaning. First, Jenny is compared to a book, half-read and dusty as the male speaker asserts

himself to be in control, to be the author of her story. The other side of the book metaphor suggests that Jenny is ultimately a mystery to the narrator. Her "half-read" pages represent a text that the speaker wants to master and define, but her life is a text that he cannot decode or decipher. Just like other male figures in the Victorian patriarchal society, he assumes that he is the best interpreter of her story. Gilbert and Gubar believe that "it is just because women are defined as wholly passive, completely void of generative power (like "Cyphers") that they become numinous to male artists." (*Madwoman* 21). The instilled *pass*ivity of women coupled with the potent *act*ivity of men left Victorians constantly trying to understand and define each other. Because men adopted aggressive roles in the community, their aggression spilled over into the domestic sphere, where they began playing the role of the dominant husband, father, or lover. The male speaker in "Jenny" assumes the role of a dominate lover which leaves Jenny unable to act as an active, powerful woman.

Further, the last line in this excerpt reveals the speaker's attitude about Jenny's own intellectual qualities. He disdainfully asks why she should understand what he is saying, for she is merely an uneducated, female prostitute. And because Jenny does not have the faculties to think intelligently for herself, the male speaks takes it upon himself to think for her. As she "sits there—deaf, blind, alone" (l. 291), he wonders what she thinks, and he spends the majority of the poem creating her thoughts for her. The first time he does so occurs when she falls asleep and he says, "For sometimes, were the truth confess'd, / You're thankful for a little rest, —" (l. 67-68). How does this man, who meets Jenny that very night, have the ability to understand what it is that Jenny is thinking? He has already addressed her as "the thoughtless queen / Of kisses" (l.7-8) and now he intends to reveal her thoughts without truly understanding her. He meets her only that evening, but he becomes comfortable with describing her life as if she is a person who can

be easily classified and categorized by her profession. One of the most ironic aspects of the poem is that while the speaker continually assumes his right to speak and think for Jenny, inevitably he cannot control her thoughts and dreams; and his attempt to articulate those for her suggests his uneasiness with his power over hers.

He does not want to know the true Jenny, her true essence; rather, from his male perspective, he classifies her and refuses to investigate her true voice. In fact, even though the poem is entitled "Jenny" and she is the main subject, never once is her voice heard. She is silent, asleep, unconscious. The male buyer has created a voice *for* her and has imposed all of his prejudices and preconceived ideas about prostitutes onto her. He treats her as an uneducated, thoughtless woman who has been shamed by the public life:

> Like a rose shut in a book
>
> In which pure woman may not look,
>
> For its base pages claim control
>
> To crush the flower within the soul; (ll. 253-56)

This image of a rose being shut up between the pages of a book seems to suggest the fact that fallen women like Jenny are shut up and pinned in by their society. Just as many Victorian women were intellectually locked in the dark and enclosed in metaphorical underground tunnels, Jenny is entrapped within a book, a phallic symbol linked to the male speaker's source of power. E. Warwick Slim comments on the speaker's book metaphor when he says, "Figuring her as text makes her ideologically inferior, the passive text read by the active reader, and he even denies her the possibility of understanding his metaphor: 'How should you know, my Jenny?' (line 53)" (148). It is appropriate and interesting that Jenny is compared to the rose, a growing, thriving plant which has been choked off by the male speaker's powerful devices--his intellect. Rossetti

is brilliant in that he develops this book metaphor from the third stanza, with the speaker's room of books, thus setting up the connection between the male speaker and books. Although Jenny is also compared to as a book, she does not get her source of power from books because she is "half-read" and the "pages of her brain / [...] Close back upon the dusty sense" (l. 160, 162). According to Rossetti, her mind is desecrated and tattered; but the male speaker on the other hand can use books symbolically to wield his power because he believes himself to be educated and intellectually superior.

Although the male speaker believes himself to be intellectually superior to Jenny, his insistence on thinking for her and for knowing what is best for her is a way of dealing with his own inferiority complex. Because she is a text he cannot decipher or read or penetrate, he is inevitably intimidated. Perhaps this is why he is so aggressively displaying his condescending attitudes toward Jenny. Brian and Judy Dobbs write, "many men were so unsure of themselves in dealing with the opposite sex that they were at ease only with a woman to whom they could feel socially superior" (86). These critics also remind us that many of the Pre-Raphaelite painters and thinkers, such as Ford Madox Brown, William Holman Hunt, John Ruskin, F. G. Stephens, and Rossetti himself, married or planned to marry women who were intellectually inferior to them. Just as many Victorians promoted the idea of women's inferiority to men, "poor shameful" Jenny is represented as being unequal to the male speaker in all qualities of life. He can summarize *her* life and comment on *her* fallen state, but the ironic thing is that once she wakes up, he has nothing more to say. He can assume his superiority over her when she is asleep and silent, but once she opens her eyes (and her mouth), he grows silent. The male speaker in "Jenny" represents the fear that Victorian men possessed with giving women too much freedom or a voice of their own.

Men in the Victorian Age did fear what would come about if women gained too much intellectual freedom, but curiously, women too were growing suspicious of female advancement. Rossetti's male speaker comments on women's fears when he says, "Even so unto her sex is [...] the life-blood of this rose, / Puddled with shameful knowledge" (ll. 275, 264-65). Obviously, women were also endorsing gender inequality, as Rossetti makes mention of in these lines. In his powerful work *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill acknowledges that women encouraged the idea that the woman's place is in the domestic sphere and that she is commanded to be lesser than her husband (1088). Many traditional women were staunch advocates of the woman's domestic sphere. The Queen of England herself believed that women were to remain in their appropriate domestic sphere. It is interesting that even though she was "the most powerful woman on earth, she denounced 'this mad, wicked folly of Women's Rights'" (Henderson and Sharpe 1011). In a letter written by Queen Victoria on May 29, 1870, she writes,

> The Queen is most anxious to enlist every one who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of 'Woman's Rights', with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety...It is a subject which makes the Queen so furious that she cannot contain herself. God created men and women different—then let them remain each in their own position. (qtd. in Marsh 98)

Throughout the endless discussions and debates about the appropriate and customary role of women in England during the nineteenth century, one thing is certain: women were very much spoken for. In "Jenny," the male speaker is dominant and in control: *He* meets with her on the dance floor. *He* speculates about her dreams. *He* creates her thoughts and desires. *He* allows her to sleep for a while. *He* leaves her in the morning. The male speaker is constantly intruding

on Jenny, which is yet another way he violates her. Because of this intrusion, Jenny's voice, just like the voices of many Victorian women, is silenced. Nina Auerbach even goes so far as to suggest the "interchangeability of the bought woman and the possessed wife, but at the last moment she [the bought woman] is always ostracized from the sanctity of the hearth" (33). From the possessed wife to the fallen woman, the way in which the male artist or male speaker defines the female voice is one of oppression and entrapment--the same feelings of restriction which the image of the underground tunnel creates for the Victorians. In his wonderful essay titled "Prostitution, Representation, and Desire: The Politics of Male Liberalism in D.G. Rossetti's 'Jenny," E. Warwick Slim writes, "Jenny is not an individual by this account: she is a generic image, the culmination of a cultural history of gender representation" (133-34). In thinking of Jenny as a Victorian woman whose voice has been buried in a masculine space, Jenny becomes more than the subject of a poem. She becomes a cultural icon.

While Jenny can be seen as a cultural icon to readers of the twenty-first century, Jenny still remained an icon of monetary value to her male buyer in the poem. In fact, the speaker of the poem begins his monologue saying, "LAZY laughing languid Jenny, / Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea" (l. 1-2). From the beginning, Jenny is seen as a useable object. She is lazy and is only worth physical or material things, like kisses or money. The speaker uses her for his physical needs and then throws her a guinea for meeting those needs. Obviously, there is a commercial exchange taking place in the poem—an exchange involving material goods and sexual services. The male speaker brings Jenny home in hopes of attaining some sort of sexual pleasure, but she falls asleep and does not deliver the service for which she is hired. As Jenny sleeps, the speaker reveals his thoughts about his purchase, and we as readers quickly learn that his disparaging remarks about Jenny derive from the fact that she is a prostitute, merely an object

in his eyes. Throughout the entire poem, Jenny is compared to items. She is on sale in the male-owned marketplace, and the speaker of the poem is buying.

Images of commerce and economic exchange are exceedingly prevalent in "Jenny." First of all, as the male speaker tells his story, he constantly mentions Jenny's worth. He says to her, "Poor beauty, so well worth a kiss!" (l. 55), and he believes her to be "a cipher of man's changeless sum / Of lust, past, present, and to come" (ll. 278-79). The meaning of the word "poor" here is twofold: first, it connotes his attitude about Jenny, emphasizing her poor, degraded state. Also, the word can mean Jenny's economic state, for she is poor and "fond of a guinea" (l. 2). Again and again, Jenny's worth is based on physical things. We have already seen that the speaker does not believe Jenny to have any social or intellectual worth, but now her worth becomes external and bodily. Her worth adds up to man's lust and his desires. She is continually measured up to what *he* believes her value to be, much like the way he believes he is the best judge of her personal thoughts. The speaker, as before, thinks for Jenny when he imagines that she dreams only of money: "I lay among your golden hair / Perhaps the subject of your dreams, / These golden coins" (ll. 340-43). Even in her unconscious state, the speaker believes that Jenny only dreams of her worth and how much money she needs. It seems that he is more preoccupied with relating her worth than she is. He is the one who constantly reiterates her worth, not she. How does he know whether Jenny thinks only of money? How can he assume that Jenny is unhappy in her station? According to Jan Marsh, prostitution was sometimes a way for women to improve their circumstances and to gain social freedom (120). Because Jenny is never given a voice in the poem, we cannot know whether she regrets doing what she does, but we can know what the male speaker thinks. He assumes that Jenny dreams only of money and is obsessed with her value, while he himself is really the one who is guilty of

pricing Jenny's worth.

Another image of economic worth in Rossetti's poem is in the beauty of Jenny's hair. The male speaker is constantly equating Jenny's hair with money. In the first stanza of the poem he describes Jenny, "whose hair / Is countless gold incomparable" (ll. 10-11). Again, Rossetti creates words which express two different meanings. Jenny's "gold" hair is literal, in the sense that it is golden blond, and figurative because the gold symbolizes Jenny's monetary worth. For Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the other Pre-Raphaelite painters, the model's hair became her beauty mark. In his exhaustive work on the Victorians, A. N. Wilson writes, "No respectable woman wore her hair loose—which is what gives these loose-haired Pre-Raphaelite maidens so much of their erotic charm for the men who painted them and the men who bought the pictures" (163). Just like the hair of the Blessed Damozel in Rossetti's painting or the hair of the lady in Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience*, the hair of Jenny is what gives her sexual appeal, and it is the very thing that defines her worth for the male speaker. At the end of the poem when the speaker sees Jenny waking up he says, "I think I see you when you wake, / And rub your eyes for me, and shake / My gold, in rising, from your hair, / A Danaë for a moment there" (ll. 376-79). This image of Jenny shaking the gold out of her hair is both powerful and compelling. It is interesting that the speaker thinks of the gold as his, not hers. The fact that he calls it his gold reaffirms the notion that he views Jenny as an object, *his* object. "When Saturday night is market-night" (l. 139), she becomes the product to be sold, the possession to be purchased, a "value sign in the world of men" (Psomiades 114). This subtle reference to Danaë also reveals the speaker's assumed superiority over Jenny. He thinks of himself as Zeus-like, descending from the Heavens to sprinkle Danaë with his golden dust. Jenny is transformed into the mythic figure of Danaë as she awakes and shakes his gold from her hair. Jenny has been victimized and silenced

by the male speaker, and like many women in the Victorian Age, she has been shut into a dark tunnel where there is no light, there are no voices, and there is no chance of societal escape.

Through the poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, we can begin to understand how the society of his time considered the issues of gender. We can further see how often times the male artist encourages the social confinement of women. In his personal life, Rossetti embodies the very fictional male artist we have been discussing. Rossetti *is* Angelo, Lancelot, the Blessed Damozel's lover, Jenny's buyer. His relationship with his model and later wife Elizabeth Siddal encompasses the way in which the male artist uses and speaks for his female subject. "Lizzie" becomes his object and he uses her to achieve the ideal beauty in his art—"his belief in an ideal of physical womanly beauty as a symbol of the unseen beauty" (Williams 197). For years, Lizzie sacrifices her time, her career, and her face for Rossetti's all-consuming passion for art. As Gilbert and Gubar observe,

> Whether she becomes an *objet d' art* or a saint, however, it is the surrender of her self—of her personal comfort, her personal desires, or both—that is the beautiful angel-woman's key act, while it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her both to death and to heaven." (*Madwoman* 25)

However, Rossetti is not the only male artist that has chosen to draw on the ever-giving face of Elizabeth Siddal. She posed for John Everett Millais in his striking Pre-Raphaelite painting *Ophelia*, where she lay in cold bathwater for four months in the middle of English winter. For the art, Lizzie almost died that winter.

Possibly the best summary of how victimized the woman subject is in the eyes of the male artist is in the poetry of Dante's sister, Christina Rossetti. In her poem "In an Artist's Studio," the speaker says,

He feeds upon her face by day and night,

And she with true kind eyes looks back on him

Fair as the moon and joyful as the light: (l. 9-11)

Like a vampire, the artist feeds on his prey, the model. She is hidden behind his canvases and devotedly poses for hours while she loses her identity and he gains his fame. She is a "nameless girl," just as the Blessed Damozel is nameless and Jenny is unable to speak her own name. The female subject is the victim. By becoming the artist's creation, she is "Not as she is, but as she fills *his* dream" (my italics l. 14). Just like the Victorian wife, Elizabeth Siddal must sacrifice her intellectual and social ambitions to meet her husband's. Rossetti and other male poets "ventriloquize women and endow them with certain preferred qualities" (Victorian Web). She is his literary subject and his physical object as she fulfills this Victorian concept of feminine entrapment. Like many Victorian poets and artists, "men both idealize women while they exploit them" (Johnson 80) for their own fame and for art's sake.

Elizabeth Siddal, along with other women, has been placed behind canvases and written about in poems not with their own identities, but with new ever-changing identities which their creators have imposed on them. Dante Gabriel Rossetti painted Elizabeth Siddal as the Blessed Damozel and Beatrice, John Everett Millais painted her as Ophelia, and Walter Deverell painted her as Viola in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Her face is never her own; it is the artist's face, as "the model sits motionless, aware that her face is being scrutinized and transformed in ways beyond her control" (Rosenblum 85). In losing her identity, she becomes the "woman who has learned to remain all beautiful surface, hidden both from herself and from the men she must please" (Cooper 76). Just as Christina Rossetti writes, the female subject fills the male artist's

dream as her voice is buried and closed off. Like the enclosure of the tunnel, the female's voice and face are buried in the imagination of her artist-creator.

Robert Browning

One of the great poetic icons of the Victorian Age was Robert Browning. Famous for his dramatic monologues, for his secret love affair with Elizabeth Barrett, and for his masterpiece collection *Men and Women*, Browning became a monumental figure in Victorian literary circles. In many ways he challenged poetic traditions: he integrated dramatic forms and literary forms to create his celebrated dramatic monologues; he tapped into the inner psyche of his subjects to reveal their inner selves; he revitalized Dante's verse form, *terza rima*, and perfected it. Despite these ways in which Browning went against the social grain, when depicting how women are treated by their male creators, he remained very Victorian. Like Tennyson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Robert Browning often creates a female character who is barred from society by an overbearing male figure. In depicting his female characters, however, Browning does so with irony. He saw the problem with enclosing women, for his own wife, Elizabeth Barrett, was very much oppressed by a dominant male figure—her father. In order to expose the wrongs in Victorian ideologies, Browning creates in "My Last Duchess," "Porphyria's Lover," and ""The Statue and the Bust," three women who are silenced and shut off from the outside world by controlling men. They are confined to their cloistered homes, buried in their own underground tunnels.

Perhaps no figure in Browning's poetry is as physically confined as Ferrara's Last Duchess. Readers are introduced to the Duke's last wife through a canvas—a canvas made by Fra Pandolf's hands by the Duke's request. The poem tells of an unnamed woman, known to

readers as Ferrara's Last Duchess, who is dead and whose story is told only through the memories of Ferrara. The Duke is touring his palace with an emissary for his next father-in-law when he stops at the portrait and begins to tell of her deeds and her disobediences as a wife. She was kind to everyone she met, but the jealous husband would always be thinking: "'Just this / or that in you disgusts me; here you miss, / or there exceed the mark" (l. 37-9). She is constantly being watched by the Duke who proudly professes that he "gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together" (l. 45-6). The late Duchess is trapped inside a canvas, and her story, like that of D. G. Rossetti's Jenny, is told by her male oppressor. Throughout the poem, the Duchess's character is depicted by Ferrara and her portrait is seen only by Ferrara's command, for "none puts by the curtain I have drawn for you, but I" (l. 9-10). He keeps her portrait hidden behind a curtain, just as he keeps her memories hidden from the public view. He regards her as nothing but a dusty piece of art, an object without any power or influence. Loy D. Martin explains the Duke's attitude toward the Duchess as merely a piece of art when he says, "He [Duke] considers works of art as discrete static objects to be owned and controlled" (76). In life and after life, the Last Duchess is dominated by the Duke, and she is never free to escape his grasp and remains forever in his canvas. She just waits lifelessly inside *his* imagination.

Browning's "My Last Duchess" also reveals how the Duke regards the portrait of his late wife by the other artworks that he displays. Paul Turner points out the speaker's "lack of feeling for his first wife, except as an art-object, by his admiration of her portrait and equal interest in a bronze of 'Neptune taming a sea-horse,' a subject symbolic of the way he treated her" (47). She is a "woman [of] decoration, the male-created woman" (Brady 125). Her canvas acts like Mariana's moated grange, the Lady of Shalott's castle, and the Blessed Damozel's Heaven. She can never leave her physical environment and her face is hidden away in a canvas behind a dark

curtain. To make a social parallel, perhaps the Last Duchess is the very domesticated, uneducated, inferior woman that Ellis and Beeton commended and the female figure that Victorian men expected in their wives. She is shaped to *his* desires, and her voice is never once heard behind his imposing dictation.

Like Ferrara's Duchess, Porphyria's voice has been ignored and muted by her lover. In his poem "Porphyria's Lover," Browning creates a woman who has been silenced vocally and eternally by a jealous, controlling male speaker. When Porphyria "glides" into the cottage and out of the storm, she is compelled to sit down by her lover and she calls after him. However, he does not reply. He ignores her calls because he is angry with her for being away at the "gay feast" without him; and, when he purposefully disregards her presence, she forces his arms around her waist. She tries to show him affection, but he resists. She tries to retain his attention, but he is uninterested. Once the male lover is sure that Porphyria's love is genuine and sincere, he wildly thinks, "at last I knew / Porphyria worshipped me...That moment she was mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good" (l. 33-37). He is so full of rage, anger, wrath, and jealousy that he must have her love perpetually. He strangles her so that she can never love anyone else. While he was dead to her figuratively in the beginning of the poem (for he would not answer her call or willingly put his arms around her), she is dead to him literally by the end of Browning's poem. He kills her for his own pride, and he proves this as he triumphantly says, "And I, its love, am gained instead" (l. 55). It is too bad that *her* life is gone, as long as *I* am satisfied. His needs are certainly more important than her life. She is a woman that has been depicted by a man and confined to his desires. She is the socially confined nineteenth-century woman whose voice is muted and silenced by her male lover or husband.

Because of Porphyria's independence in going out to enjoy herself at the feast, her lover retaliates and closes her in and will not let her escape—escape the warm cottage, escape his formidable hands, or escape her eternal fate. She becomes the victim of his jealousy and wrath and the only way for him to hold on to her is by killing her. Like Marianna, the Lady of Shalott, Jenny, and other female figures in Victorian poetry, Porphyria is trapped inside the claustrophobic underground and her voice is buried. Read socially, this poem is telling of the fears that Victorians had with giving a woman too much independence. If the Angel of the House is at the feast instead of in her domestic role, she has the potential of disrupting the social order. Similarly, if girls in the nineteenth century are going to school and becoming educated, men will begin to fear competition and displacement in the workplace. John Stuart Mill addresses this issue in his profound book *The Subjection of Women*. Seemingly, the only way for Porphyria's lover to keep her in his control is by becoming tyrannical and dominating her physically. When Porphyria first comes in from outside, she is empowered: she "glides" in, she "shut[s] the cold out and the storm" (l. 7), and she kneels to make the fire blaze. These sensory images emphasize that when Porphyria comes into the house, she brings a great amount of energy with her. Her sexual vitality threatens him, and the "lover" must keep her locked inside in order to keep her in her domestic place and to have full control over her. Porphyria is physically closed into her domestic cottage and literally asphyxiated by her lover. She is buried in a sort of underground tunnel where there are no doors or windows or outlets to rely on for deliverance.

In both "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover," the two male speakers are trying to control their lovers' sexual power. Duke Ferrara admits that he became tired of the Duchess's behavior, for "she liked whate'er / She looked on, and her looks went everywhere" (ll. 23-24).

Her inner and outer beauty sets her apart (and attracts the attention of others), and this is what Ferrara is most jealous of. It is the "spot of joy" upon her cheek which makes her attractive to other men. Her sexual vitality and energy become a threat to his manhood and his "nine-hundred-years-old name" (l. 33). Likewise, Porphyria's sexual vitality also threatens her "lover" to the point where he must kill her in order to champion his anxieties. She comes in from the feast radiating with youthful vitality while her lover sits brooding with jealously. He knows that he has no control over her while she is outside, but when she comes in and "[lays] her *soiled* gloves by, untie[s] / Her hat" (my italics ll. 12-13), he can reestablish his authority. He controls her by killing her. When she is inside *his* domain, she must succumb to his demands and she is defeated, just as Victorian women become ruled by men who have established the patriarchal society in which they live. A. N. Wilson comments on the authoritarianism of Victorian men when he writes,

> Chastity was no easier for Victorians than for anyone else, but their guilt-feelings about sex, combined with their attitudes to economics, could lead to those presumptions of possession, ownership, purchase of women by men. (162)

Because many Victorians suppressed any sexual impulses, their emotions remained very much bottled up, until their anxieties unconsciously surfaced, as they did for Duke Ferrara and Porphyria's lover. When this happens, the "patriarchal culture [...] then project[s] its sexual anxieties on to its subordinates: women, children, the lower classes, and other nations" (Marsh 118). It is the sexual powers that the Last Duchess and Porphyria have that their male controllers seek to contain. A woman's sexual vitality threatens a man, so the man strikes back in order to reclaim the control and power; and by placing a woman in a symbolic underground tunnel, it gives him a way to ensure that his voice is heard, not hers.

Robert Browning's famous poem "The Statue and the Bust" brilliantly exposes the way in which women are confined to their physical surroundings by their male counterparts. In this poem, a lady is confined within her bedroom, confined within her marital situation, and confined to the social role that women in the Victorian Age were expected to fulfill. Specifically, the Lady has become trapped inside a symbolic tunnel—a tunnel which has been designed, built, and operated by men. In this poem, the builders of those oppressive societal tunnels are the Lady's father, husband, and even her passing lover.

An in-depth textual analysis of this poem, reveals how the Lady has been restricted within her feminine sphere. First of all, the poem begins with an objective speaker telling of a story "our townsmen tell" (l. 3) about a statue in Florence. In the third line of the poem, readers are immediately thrown into a male world—a world in which stories are related by towns*men*, not townspeople. The speaker of the poem has a male voice, and perhaps this is why the poem often reflects male attitudes, as we will see throughout the poem. In fact, some scholars such as W. O. Raymond will even go so far as to suggest that the speaker *is* Robert Browning. Raymond posits that although Browning does use dramatic monologues as a way of creating speakers, in "The Statue and the Bust" Browning "avowedly speaks in his own person" (144). Whether the speaker in the poem is the poet/creator himself or a fictional voice that Browning created, one thing is certain: the way in which the Lady is portrayed and the way in which all of the male subjects oppress her reveal many of the social ideologies in Browning's world.

The first clue that readers of "The Statue and the Bust" are reading the life of a woman through the words of a male poet and male speaker is that the Lady is known only through male identifiers. She is first introduced as a lady, then as "a bride the Ricarddi brings home to-day" (1. 18). For the entire two hundred and fifty lines in this poem, she is never given a name. She

is like the Lady of Shalott and Duke Ferrara's Duchess—she has neither a proper name of her own nor an empowering identity. All she is given is a room of her own, but within that room there is no place for her to define her own person. She is merely defined by the men who keep her caged in her tower. Contrarily, the men in the poem are given proper names or descriptions: the passing lover is "The Great Duke Ferdinand" and she is the bride of Ricarddi. There is much to be examined not only in the Lady's character portrayal as she is locked away in her tower, but also it is especially significant that she is only identified in relation to men. Realizing how the male speaker describes her in her identification is pertinent in understanding how the Lady is a victim of men's oppressiveness from the beginning of the poem.

Once the "Great" Duke Ferdinand rides past the castle, he and the Lady first look upon each other with loving and curious eyes. The speaker describes the incident saying, "He looked at her, as a lover can; / She looked at him as one who awakes: / The past was a sleep, and her life began" (ll. 28-30). This passage explains that the Lady's whole life has been hollow and dead without the Duke. As a single, capable woman, her life has been useless; it is not until a man enters her life that there is meaning. Her life begins with *him* (or so the male speaker implies). Also, the very night of her wedding, her newly wedded husband calmly explains "that her lot was cast, / That the door she had passed was shut on her" (ll. 55-56). The door to her independence is slammed by her dominating husband and she is enclosed within a tunnel where there is no light, no exit, no hope of salvation. The door to marital freedom is also shut and she is permanently fixed in her domestic sphere. This passage resonates with echoes of what Julius Caesar said in 49 B.C. when he crossed the Rubicon to invade Italy. He declared "Jacta alea est," which means "the die is cast." The phrase actually means that an irrevocable decision has been made. For Caesar, his irrevocable decision is to crush through the Italian front; for the

bride of Ricarrdi, the irrevocable decision is to be sentenced to a life guarded and subjugated. Her lot is cast once she becomes the property of a tyrannical husband, and any hopes of escaping from her enclosed tower or her own underground tunnel is irrevocably denied.

The speaker further relates that the Lady is forbidden to leave her "window facing the East" (l. 59) to go to the feast. Ricarddi forbids her from physically leaving her tower, just as the Lady of Shalott is confined within her tower. The Lady must merely "watch [the festivities] like a convent's chronicler" (l. 60). She is cloistered within closed doors, shut up behind glass windows, and barred from the outside world. Further, it is interesting that once the Lady is married to Ricarddi, readers are never given any other accounts of him. It is as if he married her and left her for "nights and days in the narrow room" (l. 216) where she becomes a trophy bride; ironically, however, he never shows her off, but instead marries her for a name and status. Whether he fears she will leave him or he is just acting as the overprotective tyrant, he nevertheless initiates her entrapment.

And what exactly is this "narrow room" like and what are the consequences if she escapes her "place?" Physically, the Lady resides in a narrow room where the Duke "may ride and pass and look / where his lady watches behind the grate" (l. 143-144). She is locked into this confined space where no one is said to have entered. Before the marriage to Ricarddi, her bridesmaids could attend her, but now that she is his object, she cannot join the festivities or go outside. In fact, Ricarddi is not even mentioned as attending her himself in the room. Her only communication with the outside world is through the glassed window where she has been shut in and where unhappiness is mirrored in her face. According to Ricarddi, "'If she quits her palace twice this year, / To avert the flower of life's decline'" (l. 104-105), there will be nowhere for her to go. Like Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, she will wither and fade away if she leaves her

tower. Although she will die emotionally if she remains in her ordained place, she will die physically if she leaves. So, she decides to wait Mariana-like for Duke Ferdinand to rescue her, but both his and her indecision to act leaves her physically alive even though she is dying inside.

The Lady herself admits her own emotional entrapment when she says of her newly wedded husband,

"Your window and its world suffice,

Replied the tongue, while the heart replied—

If I spend the night with that devil twice,

May his window serve as my loop of hell

Whence a damned soul looks on paradise!" (l. 65-69)

Here, the Lady is torn between what her head knows is expected by society (that is, to remain in her place as a married woman and remain submissive to her husband) and what her heart desires. She is disgusted by this man Ricarddi who has become an authority figure to her. Yet, the Lady must continue to meet social and domestic expectations by following her husband's orders. She must keep up the appearance of being in a happy marriage. In *The Testament of Youth,* Vera Brittain comments on her Victorian upbringing and she describes that often times men and women in the nineteenth century remained married because that was what was expected in the community. Brittain writes that society "still compels married partners who hate one another to live together in the name of morality" (40). In a society based on keeping up pretenses, marriages often became relationships based on appearances—appearances that compelled a woman to say that her husband's world suffices, while inside her heart is in turmoil and agony.

In fact, the main reason why the Lady does not escape her imprisoned bed chamber to run away with Duke Ferdinand is another domineering male in her life, her father; for she says, "'My

father tarries to bless my state: / I must keep it one day more for him'" (l. 77-78). These lines in the poem reveal two major things about the marriage. First of all, as evinced from earlier lines and from the fact that her father is to bless her state, it is obvious that the father is making a business transaction with Ricarddi. The marriage is arranged for the benefit of the men, not for the Lady. Judith Weissman will remind us that "the Lady does not love her husband [...] and that the marriage is a political arrangement made between powerful men, something like the marriage implied in 'My Last Duchess'" (12-13). Both the Lady of Ricarddi and the Duke of Ferrara's Last Duchess have been priced and sold by the men controlling the commerce. Secondly, it is important to realize that the Lady remains in her place for her father—not for her mother or for her parents. The men are the ones controlling this society into which the Lady is born. The patriarchal society is (as we have seen in the first stanza) told through the towns*men*, the marriage relationships are controlled by the male breadwinners, and the familial relationships are defined by the fathers. By placing his poem in a Renaissance setting, Browning can discreetly comment on the social issues of his own time. With Ricarddi's fear of feminine empowerment, women such as Ricarddi's bride are enclosed not only within Renaissance towers, but also enclosed within a Victorian claustrophobic society.

Readers can also see the phallocentric mindset which is ingrained in Duke Ferdinand when he decides to wait to elope with the Lady. He confidently says, "'Yet my passion must wait a night.../ Today is not wholly lost, beside, / With its hope of my lady's countenance'" (l. 112, 116-117). The Duke does not rush and seize the moment to take his love away; instead, he is sure that even if he delays, she will still be there waiting in her high tower. She is the one who must wait for him, just as the Victorian wife and mother is daily waiting for her husband to come home after work. Isabella Beeton supports the idea that women should reside chiefly in the

home and she says, "a mistress should be thoroughly acquainted with the theory and practice of cookery, as well as be perfectly conversant with all the other arts of making and keeping a comfortable home" (1538) so that she can persuade her husband to come home after work rather than spending time at their clubs or taverns. Likewise, Browning's Lady must stay in her domestic place until the male breadwinner comes home. But not only is the Lady confined in her room by her oppressive husband, but she is also expected to be passive and nonchalantly await the arrival of her male admirer, Duke Ferdinand. Browning brilliantly symbolizes the Lady's inability to act when he writes,

> And she—she watched the square like a book
> Holding one picture and only one,
> Which daily to find she undertook:
>
> When the picture was reached the book was done,
> And she turned from the picture at night to scheme
> Of tearing it out for herself next sun. (l. 145-150)

This book imagery exemplifies how the Lady functions in her society. She is the reader of the marketplace, the reader of the streets, the reader of the storybooks: She must live by *reading*, not living. While Ricarddi "brings her home," Great Duke Ferdinand "rides by with the royal air," and her father "tarries to bless her state," she must engage in a silent, individualistic activity. The men interact with the world and live in this seemingly male-controlled society: the Lady interacts with the nonliving book pages and acts as an onlooker on the bustling marketplace.

Further in the poem, the memorials that both the Lady and the Duke have made are telling of the respective passive roles of women and active roles of men. Once the eager lovers realize that their love affair will never come to fruition, they both have artists create memorials

which "[fix] a beauty never to fade" (l. 168). The Lady hires the artist Robbia to fashion a bust which will remain "on the window there, / Waiting as ever, mute the while, / my love to pass below in the square!" (l. 172-174). Contrarily, Duke Ferdinand hires artist John of Douay to make a bronze statue of himself to "set [him] on horseback here aloft, / Alive, as the crafty sculptor can" (l. 203-204). The monumental importance of these two pieces of art is not that the Lady's is a bust and the Duke's is a statue, but rather the importance lies in *why* they chose the memorials that they do. The Lady wants her beauty to be fixed (similar to the beauty that Dante Gabriel Rossetti fixes in his painting of Elizabeth Siddall), and she wants to be remembered as "waiting" and "mute." She is so deeply steeped in the male-dominant Victorian society that she accepts her role as the submissive lover and wife. Ironically, her permanent inanimate bust will not be much different from how she lives in that tower while she is alive. She passively waits so long looking down from her window that all of the townspeople see her as inanimate even while she is alive. The Lady has been treated as a piece of lifeless clay her entire life. The Duke's statue, on the other hand, aptly portrays what he and the entire male-dominant ideologies supposed about the "male rescuer." He is the knight in shining armor striding on horseback and living among the townspeople. Even after death, his memory will live on in a statue that is visibly engaged in the streets. While the Lady will be mute after death, the Duke wants his statue "'to listen the while, and laugh in [his] tomb'" (l. 212). The Lady will be silenced in life and her memories will be blotted out of the histories, while the Duke's voice will be heard, even laughing in the marketplace. Her voice will be buried—buried because of the Victorian fear of entrapment and a burial which implies the social confinement of nineteenth century women.

"The Statue and the Bust" is a fine example of how the opportunities for women in the Victorian period became restricted by a male-centered world. Poets such as Alfred, Lord

Tennyson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Robert Browning create male speakers who portray wives, mothers, and daughters as passive, defenseless objects of men's needs. Women during this time became socially confined to their homes or moated granges or towers, and their voices always remained silenced by the men in their lives. Just like the underground tunnels and subways that men were designing and building during the period, their female dependents were trapped inside those tunnels and their voices were buried with them in the underground. Unfortunately, many women living in the Victorian Age *had* to accept their domestic confinement for many reasons. They could not support themselves financially. They could not represent themselves politically. They could not prepare themselves intellectually. The only choice they had was to acquiesce in accepting their confinement in the man-made tunnel.

Matthew Arnold once said, "more and more, mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us." (1030). The literature of the past has the amazing ability to interpret the values, moral, and issues of an age. In the Victorian Age, poems such as "The Lady of Shalott," "Jenny," "The Statue and the Bust," and many others convey to us as modern readers how the female subject is treated and preyed upon by the male artist. These poems shed light on how women have been *de*fined in the poetry of their male artists/creators and *con*fined in the patriarchal Victorian society by both men *and* women. Thus, the physical infrastructure of the enclosed and confined underground tunnel reflects the psychological entrapment of Victorian women—women who were, for the first time, beginning to seek some social and political independence, but were still forced to be silent and imprisoned in their domestic sphere.

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